

Report

Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine

■ 1.0 Site Description

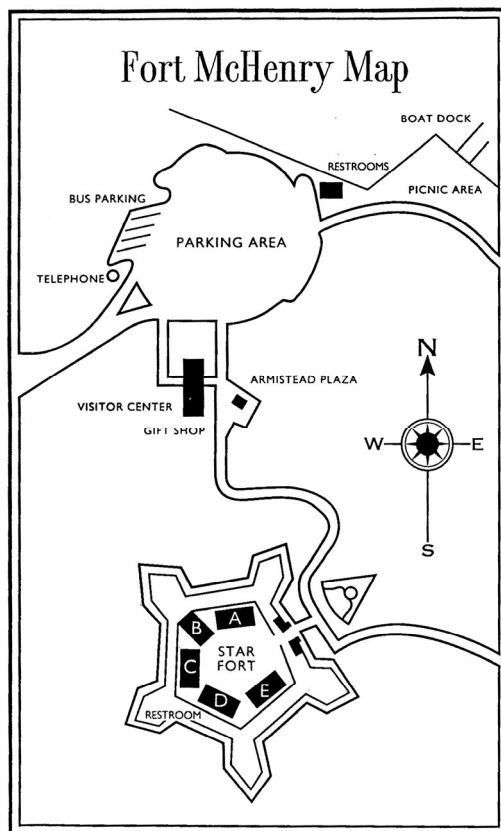
Fort McHenry is the only unit of the NPS that is both a National Monument and a Historic Shrine. It is a destination point within the newly-designated Baltimore heritage area and a site on the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. Fort McHenry is also expected to become a site on the proposed Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail that follows the British invasion route of 1812-1814.

Located in the city of Baltimore, Maryland on the Locust Point peninsula that separates the Northwest Branch and the Ferry Branch of the Patapsco River, Fort McHenry was originally established in the late 18th century as part of a national system of coastal fortifications. Fort McHenry's role in the defense of the city of Baltimore during a British attack on September 13-14, 1814 inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner." Following the War of 1812, Fort McHenry remained an active military post for over 100 years. During the Civil War, it was used as a prison camp for the detention of Confederate soldiers, southern sympathizers, and political prisoners. From 1917 until 1923, Fort McHenry was the site of U.S. Army General Hospital No. 2 and provided medical facilities for troops returning from World War I. The jurisdiction of the fort was transferred from the War Department and it became a unit of the NPS in 1933.

Due to the combination of its relatively isolated location, yet close proximity to downtown Baltimore, the President and Vice President use the park on an average of five to six times per year as the site for helicopter landings. When these activities take place, typically with little notice, the entire site is closed for the duration of the visit to Baltimore, even during peak visitation periods.

The most prominent feature of the 43-acre site is the "star fort," that has been restored to its approximate condition at the time of the Battle of Baltimore in September of 1814 (see Figure 1). A mid-1960s vintage Visitor Center and a 140-space parking area are the other major elements of the site. Several statues and monuments of individuals associated with the fort and an 1812-era powder museum are the other major visitor attractions on the site. A city of Baltimore-owned and -maintained dock provides a boarding point for the shuttle boats that connect Fort McHenry with other harbor area attractions. The site is bounded on the landside by a brick wall with a monumental gate.

Land access to Locust Point and Fort McHenry is provided by Fort Avenue, a city minor arterial street that connects to Key Highway, a city arterial route with an interchange at Interstate 95. An urban residential neighborhood is located along Fort Avenue prior to its

Figure 1. Fort McHenry Map

connection with Key Highway. Significant industrial activity takes place to the east of this development, with the South Locust Point Marine Terminal, Arthur Daniels Midland Company, and Domino Sugar all within a mile of the fort. A number of high-tech companies are moving to Locust Point as well, spurred by the transformation of the old Proctor and Gamble facility into a 21-acre industrial park called Tide Point. Plans to convert the nearby Coca Cola plant into the Locust Point Technology Center are in the works, and the area has already earned the nickname “the Digital Harbor.” A new firehouse is planned for Locust Point, as well additional residential development. As a result of all this activity, the streets near Fort McHenry are often congested, and parking, both on- and off-street, is extremely limited.

Fort McHenry is open to the public year-round, with the exception of December 25th and January 1st. Visitation at the site has been steadily increasing in recent years, having grown from 519,159 in 1993 to nearly 700,000 in 2000. The highest monthly visitation takes place during the period between May and August, with average monthly visitation during these months on the order of 80,000 persons. The NPS staff reports that visitation in the months of March, September, and October has also been growing in recent years compared to historical patterns. Fort McHenry is a fee entry unit of the NPS and a participant in the national recreation fee demonstration program. An entrance fee of \$5.00 for adults age 17 and over is charged for access to the historic fort. Children age 16 and under are allowed free access.

The current park Master Plan dates from 1969, with an update prepared in 1988. These documents state that the park's general management objective is to:

... commemorate in a respectful manner the events of the Battle of Baltimore and the writing of the national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner"; to preserve, restore, and protect for historical purposes all category A and B structures on the List of Classified Structures and the objects in the museum collection; and to facilitate public enjoyment and understanding of the historic events and people connected with the site.

NPS staff have described two main concerns at Fort McHenry: the inadequacy of the existing Visitor Center and the lack of automobile and tour bus parking. The Visitor Center, originally designed in the early 1960s to accommodate approximately 250,000 annual visitors, proved too small even at the time of its construction. Today, it is totally inadequate for the needs of the more than 685,000 people who visit the site every year. The 70-seat auditorium, for example, quickly overflows when several busloads of school-children on a field trip arrive simultaneously.

The second concern at Fort McHenry is parking. From late April to mid-June, when large numbers of school tour groups visit the park, it is not uncommon to have 40 or 50 buses access the site on a single day. With only six bus-size parking areas currently available, this level of visitation creates numerous traffic circulation problems, both in the park itself and in the surrounding community (see Figure 2). The nearby Naval Reserve Center and Maryland Port Authority permit some overflow parking in their lots, but this is seen as a less than desirable solution. In many cases, tour buses must discharge their passengers at the entrance to the site and search elsewhere in the city for parking, returning at a specified time to meet their groups. The NPS staff commented that the problem of tour bus access and parking management is growing, not only on Locust Point but throughout the downtown Baltimore area.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There are a variety of public and privately operated Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) that provide access to Fort McHenry. Although the majority of visitors arrive by private auto, a significant percentage access the site via tour bus. In 1998, a total of 76,123 persons arrived via tour bus. This represented approximately 11.1 percent of the total annual visitation. During an average year, approximately 2,000 tour buses access the site.

The local public transit agency, the Mass Transit Administration of the Maryland Department of Transportation, operates fixed-route/fixed-schedule bus to the entrance of the park along Fort Avenue. The terminus of MTA Route 1 is a bus turnaround and passenger waiting shelter just outside the fort entrance gate. Although no precise statistics on visitation by public transit are maintained, visitation by "pedestrians" in 1998 represented 53,918 persons, or about 7.9 percent of total visitation. With very few immediately adjacent residential areas, the vast majority of this "pedestrian" access can be assumed to be arrivals by public transit. The NPS staff indicated that they have not undertaken any

marketing efforts to publicize this service, but acknowledge that this would be a desirable activity to pursue as time and resources permit.

Figure 2. Bus Parking Area at Fort McHenry



Several local tour companies operate minibus/van services to the fort as well. These operations connect Fort McHenry with other visitor attractions in the Downtown Baltimore/Inner Harbor area. The NPS staff estimates that approximately 25,000 to 30,000 visitors arrive via this mode during a typical year.

An expanding ATS access mode to the site is the Harbor Shuttle Water Taxi operation. This service operates from a city of Baltimore-owned and -maintained dock located on fort property (See Figure 3). A 10-year concessionaire contract allowing a single water shuttle connection during the summer months (May through September) between the Fort and the Baltimore Inner Harbor area ended in 1998. This service cost \$5.50 per trip. During 1998, a total of 33,104 visitors (about 4.8 percent of the annual total) used this access mode.

Figure 3. Harbor Shuttle Boat Dock at Fort McHenry



In 1999, a new operator began providing this service under the sponsorship of the National Historic Seaport of Baltimore. The new Water Taxi Service has included Fort McHenry as a major stop on a more comprehensive, multiple route system of water linkages between the various visitor attractions in and around downtown Baltimore. This new service charges a fare of only \$4.50 for a one-day, multiple stop ticket. During the 1999 season, this improved service attracted the use of 57,317 persons. This represents approximately a 73 percent increase in water shuttle use in a period of only one year. The comment was made by the NPS staff that this increase took place with minimal marketing or public relations activities.

The NPS staff indicated a high degree of interest in the potential for the expanded use of this water access mode, particularly if additional off-site satellite vehicle parking areas can be identified. Subsequent conversations with representatives of the National Historic Seaport of Baltimore indicated a similar interest in the expanded use of this ATS mode. National Historic Seaport of Baltimore staff also indicated a desire to investigate the manner in which existing public bus, light rail transit, and commuter railroad services could be better integrated with the water shuttle operations.

Finally, a nearly continuous walkway around the harbor's edge offers pedestrian access to the eastern, northern, and western shorelines of Baltimore harbor. However, the walkway ends near Key Highway, amidst the industrial sprawl of Locust Point peninsula, just short of Fort McHenry. Efforts by local civic groups to extend the walkway eastward have thus far been unsuccessful, owing to the complexities of obtaining public rights-of way on privately held land on the peninsula. At this time, the Baltimore harbor walkway does not constitute an ATS for reaching the park.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

There appear to be a number of near-term ATS needs associated with Fort McHenry. Several of these appear to be of a relatively low capital intensive/marketing and public information nature. These include the following:

- The provision of improved access signing to the park from the regional highway system. Once visitors leave the interstate highway system, the perception by the NPS staff is that the standard city attractions signing to Fort McHenry is in need of improvement. The view was expressed that the installation of more traditional NPS type directional signs might be more appropriate along Key Highway and Fort Avenue.
- Expanded marketing of the availability of waterborne access to Fort McHenry, in association with the National Historic Seaport of Baltimore. This might conceivably include the dissemination of information on Fort McHenry (and the collection of fort admission fees) at the various water taxi boarding points located around the harbor area. Visitors arriving at the Baltimore Inner Harbor area would thus not have to drive their private cars to Fort McHenry, but could take the water taxi service.
- Expanded marketing of the availability of public transit service (MTA Route 1) for access to Fort McHenry. A longer-term objective of this effort might be the creation of an MTA operated bus route connecting the various visitor attractions in the area similar to the “Cultural Loop Bus” operated by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) in Downtown Philadelphia.
- Expanded coordination with the city of Baltimore in the development of a tour bus management plan. Given the limited on-site space available for tour bus access, the ability to provide convenient off-site parking for large numbers of tour buses and to provide secondary access (via either smaller buses or waterborne transport) could reduce traffic impacts on the Fort.

Fort McHenry hopes to build a new Visitor Center and remove the original 1960s structure. This would not only increase the space available at the park for exhibits and shows, but would permit the authentic restoration of the star fort’s immediate surroundings. Two locations are currently being considered for the new center: an existing industrial building just outside park boundaries on East Fort Avenue, and the Corps of Engineers property immediately adjacent to the water on Baltimore harbor, not far from the boat dock. In either scenario, the relocated center would be only a few hundred yards away from its current location, so no additional need for an ATS inside the park would be created. However, the choice of location would significantly impact the site’s success in attracting visitors to the park using an ATS. Moving the center to the water’s edge would, in effect, open Fort McHenry’s front door to visitors arriving by harbor shuttle, a gesture that would encourage the use of ATS.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The observed increases in annual visitation at Fort McHenry indicate that this is an NPS site in need of a more in-depth examination of its external transportation needs. The rapid growth in waterborne access and continuing high levels of tour bus access are issues in need of improved management and coordination in the near term.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

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■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

John Kellett, Executive Director, National Historic Seaport of Baltimore, Inc.

Greg McGuire, Chief of Maintenance, Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine, January 12, 2001.

Rick Nolan, Chief Ranger and Acting Superintendent, Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine.

Joyce Bauerle, President, Locust Point Civics Association, Baltimore; Board of Patriots of Fort McHenry, January 12, 2001.